

The Joseph Story | Broken Family/Beautiful Plan

Four Dreamers

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Genesis 40-41 (40.20 - 41.16)

Thus it came about on the third day, which was Pharaoh's birthday, that he made a feast for all his servants; and he lifted up the head of the chief cupbearer and the head of the chief baker among his servants. ²¹ He restored the chief cupbearer to his office, and he put the cup into Pharaoh's hand; ²² but he hanged the chief baker, just as Joseph had interpreted to them. ²³ Yet the chief cupbearer did not remember Joseph, but forgot him.

Now it happened at the end of two full years that Pharaoh had a dream, and behold, he was standing by the Nile. ² And lo, from the Nile there came up seven cows, sleek and fat; and they grazed in the marsh grass. ³ Then behold, seven other cows came up after them from the Nile, ugly and gaunt, and they stood by the other cows on the bank of the Nile. ⁴ The ugly and gaunt cows ate up the seven sleek and fat cows. Then Pharaoh awoke. ⁵ He fell asleep and dreamed a second time; and behold, seven ears of grain came up on a single stalk, plump and good. ⁶ Then behold, seven ears, thin and scorched by the east wind, sprouted up after them. ⁷ The thin ears swallowed up the seven plump and full ears.

Then Pharaoh awoke, and behold, it was a dream. ⁸ Now in the morning his spirit was troubled, so he sent and called for all the magicians of Egypt, and all its wise men. And Pharaoh told them his dreams, but there was no one who could interpret them to Pharaoh. ⁹ Then the chief cupbearer spoke to Pharaoh, saying, "I would make mention today of my own offenses. ¹⁰ "Pharaoh was furious with his servants, and he put me in confinement in the house of the captain of the bodyguard, both me and the chief baker. ¹¹ "We had a dream on the same night, he and I; each of us dreamed according to the interpretation of his own dream. ¹² "Now a Hebrew youth was with us there, a servant of the captain of the bodyguard, and we related them to him, and he interpreted our dreams for us. To each one he interpreted according to his own dream. ¹³ "And just as he interpreted for us, so it happened; he restored me in my office, but he hanged him." ¹⁴ Then Pharaoh sent and called for Joseph, and they hurriedly brought him out of the dungeon; and when he had shaved himself and changed his clothes, he came to Pharaoh. ¹⁵ Pharaoh said to Joseph, "I have had a dream, but no one can interpret it; and I have heard it said about you, that when you hear a dream you can interpret it." ¹⁶ Joseph then answered Pharaoh, saying, "It is not in me; God will give Pharaoh a favorable answer."

This is our fourth week looking at this long story, the Joseph Story at the end of Genesis. It's almost one third of the entire book. And today we have a very long section...over 80 verses even though we read only about 20...So, we have a lot to cover...

I don't expect to take more TIME than usual for this sermon but the sermon itself is actually about TIME... This section is about the passing of time and how DELAY, waiting for things to work, out can be a frustrating and sometimes disappointing exercise.

AND about how SOMETIMES things don't work out at all... sometimes (as in this passage) sometimes "heads roll"...people lose their lives. Sometimes life ends in disappointment and death comes unexpectedly. This story/episode has a happy ending for Joseph and in some ways THIS is what he's been waiting for but it certainly didn't come without a price or in Joseph's timing. It took a toll on Joseph. This is a sermon about delay, disappointment and how to deal with it.

And though disappointment/delay makes up the dark background of this painting (like a Rembrandt) there IS a very bright light dawning, a ray of powerful HOPE that can sustain US in OUR delays...in our disappointments and even in that ultimate disappointment which is death itself.

A story of Four Dreamers, what we learn from the story and how we fall into the story

We spoke, last time about how Joseph went into Egypt in handcuffs puzzled about those dreams God had given Joseph dreams – he's the first of our four dreamers. In his dreams the brothers and the parents are all bowing to him. ...and as the brothers watched him being led away they mocked him one last time, "Now we'll see what becomes of his dreams! Ha...ha...ha!"

In his dreams he's lifted up but in his experience he goes down to Egypt and is then arrested when Mrs. Potiphar falsely accuses him of rape. And he goes down once again into the dungeon – the pit! And he HAD to be wondering about those dreams!...

So, Joseph goes down into the pit again...down into the dungeon (REMEMBER THE ALTERNATION in the Joseph Story, how he goes down and then up...down and up). So, he goes down into prison... And in the prison once again God is with Joseph and ...people notice that this Hebrew kid is just blessed.

Everything he does shows evidence of God's presence ...so he sails through the ranks and becomes the prisoner liaison ...he is in charge of ALL the other inmates...And that's when this DREAM THING comes up again...two royal prisoners (the cupbearer [which was a very high ranking position...almost like chief-of-staff] AND the chief baker) and these two high-ranking prisoners look really troubled...Joseph inquires and it turns out, they've had dreams!

Now, YOU'D THINK...Joseph might answer, "No thanks! I tried my hand at that dream thing once before and it didn't work out at all...just the opposite of what I thought!"

But instead, the conversation goes like this, “Then they said to him, ‘We have had a dream and there is no one to interpret it.’ Then Joseph said to them, ‘Do not interpretations belong to God? Tell me, please.’” (40.8)

AND evidently he still believes HIS dreams will come true...that they were from God and they were God’s promise to Joseph. So, he goes for it...God gives him the interpretation and it happens just like God said it would...Three days later at Pharaoh’s birthday party, the cupbearer gets lifted up (in restoration) and the chief baker gets lifted up on the gallows...his body is left hanging in a tree for the birds to eat ...as a cautionary tale. He doesn’t get to be mummified and he WON’T be able to cross the Great River and won’t have eternal life as the Egyptians believed ... “cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree” (Deu 21.23)...

And the chapter ends with Joseph saying TWICE, “Remember ME!!...So I can get out of this place!” and the cupbearer who made it out alive and was restoredhe could’ve put in a good word with Pharaoh... “Yet the cupbearer did not remember Joseph, but forgot him.” 40.23

Two long years transpire, Joseph languishing in the dungeon. And THEN Pharaoh is troubled with his OWN vivid and wild dreams...And the cupbearer confesses, “I forgot this guy...this Hebrew can interpret dreams.”

And because all the king’s men are stumped... Joseph is called from the pit and gets a makeover (a good shower and a shave and a new suit...and “off to see the wizard”...most powerful man in the world). Pharaoh tells the dreams and Joseph gets to speak:

“Here’s your once chance – don’t blow it!” After 13 years to think about it how will Joseph respond to the Wizard of Oz...the king of the world, the great Pharaoh... “Can you interpret this dream...do you have it in YOU?”

Answer: “Nope...it’s NOT in me...who can give Pharaoh a positive outcome (shalom) but God alone?”... There’s no cockiness; he has achieved low self-esteem...he points to God...and Pharaoh LIKES it!

Pharaoh relates the troubling dreams...two of them: 7 gorgeous, healthy cows swallowed by seven skinny diseased cows and again, seven fat, sweet ears of corn swallowed by seven dry, sickly dead ears of corn...WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

Joseph not only answers but then offers a beautiful plan – there will be seven years of bumper crops... an unusually large harvest for seven years... followed by (or should we say swallowed by) seven years of drought and famine and almost NO CROP at all....

“You need a Prime Minister,” says Joseph, “a plan to store grain during the years of plenty and then to distribute that stored grain during the years of shortage...” Pharaoh says, “We need a man who is possessed by a divine spirit...and YOUNG MAN ...YOU ARE that man!”

So, on the spot he makes Joseph the most powerful man in the world...he gives him Pharaoh's own signet ring (unlimited authority!) and commands everyone in the Kingdom to obey every word Joseph says ...then Pharaoh gives Joseph a name that is above every name...and a bride...

And the plan goes perfectly as God unfolded it...There's an immense stockpile of stored grain...thousands of people from all over the wider region are spared from starvation. In the people of Abraham will all the nations be blessed.

AND we're told a little detail that sets up the rest of Israel's history AND tells us something about Joseph's psychological state. Joseph is said to have two sons born to him by his Egyptian bride.

The second son is named "Ephraim" meaning "fruitful" (which we can understand!) but the first son is named "Manasseh" which means "making forget"... i.e. "may this child make me forget my past hurts" 41.51 Joseph named the firstborn Manasseh, 'For,' he said, "God has made me forget all my trouble and all my father's family."

BUT the reader wonders, "If you've really forgotten your father's family...how come you named your child about forgetting your father's family...YOU may be desperately TRYING to forget...but it doesn't seem to be working!"

The chapter ends with a note – "then there was famine in all the lands, but in all the land of Egypt there was bread... and the people of all the earth came to Egypt to buy grain from Joseph" (41.54-57)

So THAT is the story of the FOUR DREAMERS – Joseph, the Cupbearer, the Chief Baker and the King of the World, Pharaoh.

What we learn from this story: Well, the Israelite's would look back on this story and realize that while God would sometimes put His people into bad situations...like slavery in Egypt and later, slavery in Assyria and Babylon and occupied by Rome...and while they were IN these tough situations they were to be a blessing to the Nations.

God will tell Jeremiah to speak to the Israelites in Babylon and tell them NOT to freak out...not to try and overthrow the bad Babylonians (and they WERE bad...really bad!) but instead to seek the "shalom" of the city where God had planted them.

And the Israelites could look back at THIS story for a vivid precedent detailing how God would USE HIS people...to BE a blessing to the nations.

The world needs the Church...because the Church represents Abraham's God ...the God of hesed, of grace. He is the God that cannot be reached by religion or spirituality. Even if those

spiritual and religious approaches have aspects and features that are admirable or lovely (and they all do) but God cannot be known by OUR climbing UP...only by His coming down...and God came down to Abraham and his people.

And the Israelite's would learn from this story that human strength and connections and having powerful friends...can NEVER replace knowing God. The cupbearer forgot Joseph. He begged the man to remember him...and Joseph seems to have trusted in this connection...but the cupbearer forgot. Later, the prophets would urge, "Put no confidence in princes."

Joseph is learning faith in the pit and in the end he realizes... "Poor though I am, despised, forgot...yet God, MY GOD, forgets me not." And IN that posture of trust (learned in the pit)...Joseph stands before the King of the World and he is this amazing mix of confidence and humility, "IT IS NOT in me! Only God can speak peace to Pharaoh and to the world!" What a great lesson for the church today!

The people of Abraham would learn from this story that waiting, that delays, that disappointments are a significant part of walking with Abraham's God, the God of grace...He values trust...He works faith into His people by delays...by making us wait.

And eventually when the people of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob could wait no longer, "in the fullness of time God sent forth His Son, born of a virgin, born under the Law that He might redeem those who were born under the Law".(Gal 4.4)

HE, not Pharaoh, is King of the world and yet when He comes into the world He made, He would take the place of the criminal. Jesus Christ becomes the prisoner who is NOT spared like the chief baker ... "Spare the cupbearer" says Pharaoh and "give us the baker to hang on the gallows" ...And so, when God came into the world in Jesus Christ, the crowd says to Pilate... "Give us Barabbas...and let the Rabbi hang, the One born in Bethlehem (House of Bread)."

Little did they know that this Rabbi, Jesus Christ, was more than a chief baker – He was the Bread of Life, which COMING DOWN out of heaven gives life to the World (John 6). And like the old chief baker, Jesus Christ would die that cursed death, "cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree." (Gal 3.13)

Joseph came out of the pit...because Jesus Christ would later take His place IN the pit...the Prisoner who was not spared...so that ALL who trust Him could be spared and have our heads lifted up in everlasting shalom.

Now, whenever we read a great story like this, we can't help but fall INTO the story. We identify with one or more of the characters. Maybe you see yourself in the role of Joseph...and you're looking for that happy ending. You're hoping to get to the end of this two years in the dungeon (at a dead-end job or a time of unemployment/under-employment or a time of the doldrums in

your marriage or a bad time with one of your children...or a bout with bad health) and if you can just hold on...you dream of BEING DISCOVERED! That God will lift you up make your life really meaningful...and I HOPE that happens for you!

BUT in the meantime...we're learning not to put our ultimate hope in doctors or governments or our good connections or professionals..."Remember me!" says Joseph to the cupbearer...but two years in that dungeon made it clear – "though all forget you, God will not." Joseph emerges with big confidence and amazing humility (rarely seen in the same person!)

And, ya' know, it's one thing to look at this story and say, "Ah! Great!...another reminder that for everyone who, like me, trusts in Jesus Christ, the greater Joseph who was lifted out of the pit, out of the tomb in resurrection and given the name above every name...became the source of unlimited bread for a spiritually famished world – it's good to get another reminder that it's all gonna work out in the end and according to God's plan! Great sermon...God is in control... let's go home!"

But ... this week when Missy and I got back from her dad's funeral...after 11:00pm... "dog-tired" and a little grumpy... On the way out of the parking garage I crashed into a car...Technically my fault (WHICH IS ANOTHER WAY OF SAYING IT WAS MY FAULT)... and filling out paper work til after midnight...and the other driver kind of irate...being embarrassed and just wanting to be asleep...AT A MOMENT LIKE THAT are we still able to know that the God who sets up Pharaohs and takes them down...who rules the grain supply of all the world...who gave grace to the people of Abraham...who determined the death of Jesus Christ (and planned it from all eternity) ARE WE ABLE TO REST in the fact HE HAS determined this moment...derailed my agenda...for my GOOD?

Knowing Jesus Christ means that eventually we come to know that this miserable moment is actually the hand of the Potter molding this clay...teaching us faith in the pit...in the delay...and making me more fit to hold the treasure of grace...I am a player in His Story...but He is the Writer and Director and always the Main Character.

AND when I see Him through the lens of Jesus Christ THAT is the best news there could ever be.

The Communion - 10.6.13

Joseph named his son "Making Me Forget My Painful Family" but we know Joseph couldn't forget.

Three points on this: 1) Many of us have painful stuff in our families we wish we could forget. Is it possible that these pains are there to send us looking for the Father who will never disappoint? And that somehow God will use these pains in ways you've never imagined?

2) For Joseph to forget his family would have been to forget the Church – in that day, Jacob's messed up family was the church...the whole church. Later the Psalmist would say, "If I forget you, O Jerusalem, may my right hand forget her skill. May my tongue cling to the roof of my mouth If I do not remember you, If I do not exalt Jerusalem above my chief joy." (137)

Some Christians leave the church because they get burned in the church...but few that I know have been thrown into a pit and then sold (by the church) in to slavery in Egypt... But the fact IS, Joseph could not forget that messed up church because God doesn't LET HIS CHILDREN forget the church!

So this may be your chance – if you are a Christian but have forgotten the Church (maybe been burned by the church) TODAY! Don't delay...if you're NOT attached to some church by vows ...don't take the communion but DO take the opportunity to say, "I tried to forget, like Joseph, but I can't...and I want to join this church...or get help finding one." Come talk to Me.

Last, remembering is so big in this whole story. (In the whole Bible!) The cupbearer forgot. God remembered.

AS WE COME TO THIS TABLE we hear the words, "Do this in remembrance of Me... let's come remembering that God remembers us...the whole world came to Joseph for bread and in Jesus Christ, the Bread of Life, there is all that a hungry soul could need...Let's come to Him!